

4th RMI Embassy Meeting to Prepare for the January Majuro Meetings December 6, 1996, 11:00 p.m.

This two hour session at the RMI Embassy was a productive one from the standpoint that an option for a more long-term medical infrastructure improvement in the form of a telemedicine assets for the Marshall Islands was placed on this day's meeting agenda by Holly Barker.

Dr. Tony Capone, an ophthalmologic surgeon from the Emory Clinic Inc. at Emory College in Atlanta Georgia and Mr. Joseph Wilkes from the U.S. Department of Education attended. They presented and considered with us, options on how telemedicine assets may be able to be established in Majuro and possibly at Ebeye. This will be discussed in more detail below in the "Telemedicine Issues" section..

Administrative Issues

- o Holly Barker handed out a draft Agenda prepared by Minister Muller for the January 27-31, 1997 meetings in Majuro. A hard copy has been provided to Paul, Andy and Frank for review. Ambassador de Brum's presence in Majuro facilitated this release.

Initial USG reaction was that it may be hard to reach "Decision-making" in the third phase of at least four of the issues that may involve Congressional interaction and change to law. It was suggested that "Resolve" or "Agreement actions" may better reflect a more definable objective. Department of State may be uncomfortable with a joint Minister Muller and Paul Seligman chair of each issue area.

- o Tom Bell provided the updated draft of the DOE/Ministry of Health MOU for sharing of medical records and joint facilitation of medical referrals between the DOE Marshall Islands Medical Program (MIMP) and the 177 Health Care Program (177 HCP). Three reactions from Holly were presented based on review of the previous draft:
 - The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) preference is to have a permanent structure built next to the 177 HCP site at Majuro with possible payment by DOE as a long term lease payment that would eventually pay for it. The use of DOE provided trailers was ruled out.
 - The RMI Embassy would like to add in section "III. Understandings" a new numbered paragraph that states: "In an addendum to this agreement, the parties will set forth the financial requirements, terms and conditions in order to establish, operate, and maintain the joint record office."
 - In section "IV. Sharing Medical Data and Records" in paragraph one, the RMI Embassy recommends deleting the last sentence of that paragraph dealing with a signed release by each patient. They reason presented is that this is redundant with Section III, the original paragraph 2 which says that records will be maintained by Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO).

- **(Action item)** - Tom Bell is to call Greg Beatty, Mercy International, and discuss how best to achieve the joint sharing of medical records and report back at next meeting scheduled for December 17, 1996 at 11:00 a.m.
- o Nancy Fanning and Joe McDermott handed out a draft letter for joint signature of Al Stayman and Paul Seligman to John Monahan, Esq., Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Office of the Deputy Secretary, HHS. A copy has been provided to Paul, Andy and Frank for review.

In a followup call to Joe McDermott after discussing this with Paul, it appears Mr. Monahan's role seems limited to hosting the meeting and making the introductions. Joe said it would then be up to Al Stayman and Paul to make the case and request for the needed increase in placement of Public Health Service personnel in the Marshall Islands.

- o Holly Barker agreed that DOE could send out its invitations for the January meeting to contractor program managers, Terry Vaeth and Jay Davis, as Tom Bell requested.
- o Tom Bell presented the RMI Embassy with the opportunity to share in a Workshop on Societal Aspects of Radiation Protection. This workshop is to held in late summer or early fall, 1997. It is an effort under the auspices of the Committee on Radiation Protection and Public Health (CRPPH) as part of the Nuclear Energy Agency's (NEA) activities. Chernobyl and the uranium miners in Eastern Europe have been initially recommended.

The DOE representative to the NEA (Rick Jones, EH-52) has offered that the Marshall Islands might present another beneficial case study for the program being planned. A fifteen minute presentation on U.S. radiological protection initiatives would be presented. Following that the RMI would present another 15 minutes segment devoted to listing societal issues that are being expressed by a population that is dealing with returning to a contaminated living environment.

At the meeting with Paul after the RMI Embassy meeting, it was suggested that Heather Stockwell contact Rick Jones as to the possibility of including a case study on Fernalt as well.

- o **Action Item:** Holly Barker said she has recently learned that DOE has a \$70 million a year education budget and asked if we at DOE could explore if there is any educational grant money that could be earmarked for educational activities in the Marshall Islands.

Telemedicine Issues

- o Antonio Capone, M.D. (404-778-5224) presented Emory College interest and willingness to round up grant money that could provide telemedicine capabilities at Majuro initially. He pointed out that early ophthalmic examination of the fundus of the eyes of Marshallese

could pick up the early beginnings of diabetes and preventive medicine could greatly reduce the serious late diabetic complication seen in Marshallese patients. He is particularly interested because the Marshall Islands is in one of the most remote areas of the world and they are an English speaking population. If they can show its usefulness there, it could be useful in many other areas of the world.

He pointed out that indigenous diabetes in U.S. patients 25-65 years of age is about 5%. In the Marshall Islands that indigenous rate is more like 30%. He noted that 60% of hospital inpatients in the Marshall Islands have diabetes. 15% if those diabetic patients examined have active retinopathy. This is precipitated by the Marshallese diet of highly refined sugars consumed in the foods eaten and Vitamin A deficiency due to the staple of white rice in infant diet.

Dr. Capone is proposing to find funding for appropriate digital camera equipment, a Picasso image and voice transfer system and to work with U.S. Departments, Agencies and/or the Military to gain access to either a satellite or more sophisticated T-1 military communication line. With these assets in place at Majuro and with the needed telecommunication links, physicians in the U.S. or at Emory could see images on live patients undergoing ophthalmic examinations in the Marshalls or could take 50 images from 25 patients and download those to the U.S. with diagnosis done in 50 minutes.

These telemedicine techniques have particularly good application in dermatological examinations and if the transmission lines are of high enough quality will allow transmission of radiographic images and ophthalmologic ultrasonography.

Dr. Capone is proposing that with grant money amassed, he envisions that they could rotate physicians in for two-three weeks on a quarterly basis. Physician expertise would include ophthalmologists, dermatologists, emergency medicine physicians, primary care physicians and radiologists.

Dr. Capone offered to develop the costs associated with the equipment and telecommunications links needed and it was proposed that these would be discussed at a later date via teleconference. It was further proposed that Emory College, with RMI travel and per diem provided, would send a Dr. Bridges and a photographer who is very savvy in telecommunication imaging to the Marshall Islands for a two week period in the Spring of 1997. This would be conducted in the format of a needs assessment.

- o Mr. Joe Wilkes, Department of Education attended to see if he could marshal U.S. regional assets. He suggested that the Pacific Regional Educational Laboratory (PREL) in Honolulu might be of assistance. He gave as a point of contact, Mr. John Kofel (808-533-6000, e:mail kofelj@prel.hawaii.edu. He suggested a call to Mr. Kofel might help to facilitate joint efforts to work toward the telemedicine objectives. He will also talk with a Ms. Sherry Wise at the Department of Commerce and a Ms. Kathy (Kate) Bridwell at the Department of Agriculture who might also be of assistance.